1687
t
698.c.10

A Second LETTER From a Gentleman in the COUNTRY, To his Friends in LONDON, Upon the Subject of the Penal Laws and Tests.

Licensed, April *the* 11*th* 1687.

LONDON,
Printed, for *J. H.* and *T. S.* and to be had of most *Booksellers* in *London* and *Westminster*. 1687.

A Sermon

PREACHED IN THE

COUNTRY,

AND

LONDON,

Before Lords and Others.

Gentlemen,

I Am not much lifted up, or caſt down at the news you ſend me, for that my Letter ſhould be liked by ſome, and as ill taken by others, is but the fate of all things offer'd to publick cenſure; tho without vanity, the reaſons are unequal. But before I enter upon that, you'l give me leave to obſerve the humor of the Party in the Proverbs you ſent me, that methinks looks ſo much like a *Green Ribband*, that it hardly becomes the fall of the leaf, they conceit they are under. You ſay, the uſual anſwer to the Letter is this; *There is a Snake in the Graſs; All is well that ends well*, That a more moderate ſort; allow it both *witt and truth, but ill timed, conſidering the Melancholy circumſtances the Church of England is under.* To all this, you have here my anſwer, which I beſeech you to communicate with that Cander, that you know has alwayes been the companion of my Life. And for the Proverbs, I muſt ſay firſt, that a wiſe Sentence, may be fillily apply'd; and next, I am apt to think that theſe are ſo; for pray what is the *Snake*, and

where doe's it lie. A *Snake* without a *Sting* hurts no body, let it lie where it will; and a *Snake* with a *Sting* is dangerous every where. Now to find out who is the *Snake*, let's consider what's the Sting, The *Penal Laws* certainly; and you are not ignorant who's Tayle they belong to. But to be sure they Sting all that won't come to Church, and that every where. For a man can't walk in his own Land, mow his own Grass, enjoy his own Shop, Barn, Chamber, Closet, Chest or Cubbard; no not his Pot, Pan or Skiller, but the *Snake* will get into it, and when it has swept his Fields and House clean with its Tayle, by the Teeth it draws him to its dark Holes and Dungeons for a further Prey. The History of this *Snake* out-does all the Giants of the old World, and it had been happy it had perish't with it: Wherefore *Liberty of Conscience* is so far from being the *Snake in the Grass*, that there is in it neither Snake, Teeth, Sting, or Grass to hide them. On the contrary, it spies out the Snake, cuts the Grass, ketches it, and pulls out the Sting, that it may do no more mischief: 'Tis upon this Principle that one Party cannot hurt 'tother. And for the other Proverb, 'tis certain, *All's well that ends well*, but for that reason all will end ill that begins so, without Repentance. And such beginnings I call *Penal Laws* for Religion, let who will make them, or

use

uſe them. And I beſeech God to touch the Hearts of the Church of *England* with a ſence of this; for his Juſtice we can't Corrupt. All Parties as well as private Perſons will meet with their own from him; 'tis a Decree as old as the World, ſtamp't in our Natures, and prov'd by the Records of all time, and God knows but too plainly in ours.

But ſince theſe Gentlemen are upon their Proverbs, with their leave I will oppoſe a couple to them, and I hope a little better ſuited. *Let every Tub ſtand upon its own Bottom*; and *A Bird in the Hand is worth two in the Buſh.* Theſe are the Texts, I'le now give you the Comment. By the firſt, I mean, that the Government ſhould ſtand upon its own Legs, and the Church upon hers. The Legs of the civil Government, is the civil Intereſt of the Government, which is that of all the People under it, ſo that the Government is obleiged to ſecure all, becauſe all are for their own Intereſt bound to ſecure it: For the Church in Queſtion, of which all the People are not Members, nor yet the greateſt part, is a thing of another Nature, and relates to another World, and Chriſt has provided her another Bottom, if ſhe really makes his Law the rule of her Actions and Authority. *Let every one walk as he is perſwaded*, was divine Doctrine in St *Paul*'s time, *and our Glo ying*

was to be in our ſelves, and not in another; and we were to ſtand and fall to our own Maſters, and not Judge, much leſs Perſecute others, no, not *Tares*, for they were to grow with the *Wheat*, (tho never like to change their Nature) till the Harveſt, which our Saviour Interprets, *the end of the World*: And the Apoſtle tells us, *Every One muſt appear before God, and give an Account for the Deeds done in the Body*; ſo that you ſee the Proverb is true, that *every Tub ought to ſtand upon its own bottom*. For the other, 'tis as obvious & reaſonable in this caſe; for why ſhould it be taken ill that the Poor Fanaticks accept the Liberty the Church of *England* refus'd, and has driven them to ſuch extreamities for. She would have them to ſtay till ſhe can give what ſhe would not when ſhe had power to do it. Nay, ſhe has it ſtill, & yet will not for a reaſon that expoſes them more then before. But which way can ſhe enſure it to them? *Firſt*, Can they with Honour or Conſcience refuſe what they have ſought, or reject that by Declaration the Church of *England* will not allow by Law? *Secondly*, How are they aſſur'd, while the Church of *England* is by Law ſecured, that by thoſe very Laws they ſhall not be ruin'd in the mean time? Is it not natural enough to expect at the hand of the King, that they that will not, ſhall not have Liberty of Conſcience? and that at any rate,

rate, they shall conform thorowly, that will not at an other time conform at all, When they do it now only to bob the Goverment? But what is Faction if this be not? If conform, why just now? If now, why not before? If not before, why then now? if things are the same, why are not they? and if they are, that is, if their opinion of the Discipline and Ceremonies of the Church be what it was, they can't be honest men and conform: They may set up for men of Art, and Managers, that have given by their own Consciences such a proof of their skill; but I should lament extreamly any Dissenter in *England* should have so little wit or truth. And to be free, it would not look Candid in the Church of *England*, that gives her fear of Poperies having the Power to destroy others, for the reason of her keeping the Penal Laws on foot, if she takes it ill, that the Dissenters are for the same reason for their repeal; for she can't but think that Popery actually has that Power over them, by the Opportunity of the Laws she will maintain to secure her self. So that light and darkness are not more opposite then the safety of the *Dissenters*, and the reason the Church of *England* gives for the keeping up the *Penal Laws* for her own. To remove this Difficulty, and to make the methods of their security meet, has, God knows, been my only drift, that so false Notions of

Perservation

Preſervation might not deſtroy us, when the means of our common ſafety are ſo obvious to us.

The general and deep Prejudices men entertain againſt *Popery* will hardly ſuffer them to diliberate for their own benefit. If a Ship be near a Rock, I think the danger ſhould not frighten away the Maſters wits, when he has moſt need of them for a common Safety. I beg the Gentlemen of the Church of *England* but to think, and I am Sure they will find me leſs Criminal in my other Letter to you: For is any thing truer then that the *Papiſts* court a legal Eaſe? need they this, if they deſign Force? or were it worth their Labouring? Again, cannot a Law be made to fix *Liberty of Conſcience*, that they ſhall as uneaſily violate, as theſe the Church calls her Bulwark? If the Laws in Queſtion were defenſive only, God forbid that I ſhould attempt to leſſen her ſecurity, I declare in the preſence of God I would not; but when they are offenſive and deſtroying to other People, and thoſe of the moſt peaceable Principles, who have neither Intereſt nor Arts to defend them, ſhe muſt Pardon me if I oppoſe my ſelf to their Teeth and Sting. It is alſo as true that her Diſſenters are of no uſe to her unleſs theſe Shackles are taken off; That if ſhe does not fear *Liberty* more then *Popery*, ſhe muſt yeild the point deſired for their ſake, becauſe her own.

That

That for every Enemy ſhe releaſes by it, ſhe has an hundred Friends to ſecure her againſt Him. That ſhe muſt remember ſhe is but a part of the whole, and ſhould not flatter her ſelf with Numbers not of her Communion; eſpecially while they ſleep with naked Swords hanging by Hairs over their Heads, and ſo are made uncapable to ſerve her.

Again, pray, can ſhe think that force becomes a Goſpel Church? that it is not uſing againſt Popery what ſhe accuſes it for, and by it condemns her ſelf? Is it not taking Sanctuary in human Strength inſtead of divine Truth, that is al-ſufficient to its own ſupport? That the Laws that remain, ſecure the State, and if any be wanting, they may be added without keeping up the Ball of Vengeance by partial Proviſions, directed by one Party, of the ſame People, againſt an other, under one and the ſame Government; for this is puzling, not ſerving Government: Nor can any be great, eaſie or ſucceſsful where the *Heads* and *Hands*, that ſhould make it ſo, are zealouſly diſabled from that Duty and Service. It ſeems a day wherein God is pleaſed to make uſe of the Neceſſities of Men to effect what Vertue and Wiſdom ſhould have taught us long ago to have done; Agree I mean upon our civil common Intereſt.

And now we have a King, who has ſo gracious a

 regard

regard to *Liberty*, (and that chuſes to recommend himſelf by ſo honeſt, ſo tender and ſo equal a Principle, and whoſe own Party, tho they may want it moſt hereafter, do leaſt need it now, and are the moſt feeble in number to make the uſe of it dangerous to the reſt) let us by no means looſe the opportunity of our own Happineſs. Nor can the Church of *England* refuſe me my Petition to her, but upon this ſingle account, *the Inſincerity of the King*; that muſt be her *Snake in the Graſs*, *that Popery's at the Bottom*: *Mark the end of this Liberty*; *All's well that ends well*: But this plainly implies my Arguments to be good, and that if the King holds as he begins, we ſhall all be happy. Lets ſee then why he ſhould not do ſo, tho it looks very ill in the high Sons of the Church to blow upon that Honour they have ſo often and ſo highly recommended for our Security. *Firſt*, The King has given her his Word to maintain her at his coming to the Crown, and has now repeated it to her for the whole time of his Reign, in the moſt ſolemn manner that was poſſible out of Parliament. *Secondly*, If he be willing, to turn this Promiſe into a Law at the repeal of thoſe he would aboliſh when they meet, and that to be ſure he is ready to do, there can be no room to doubt his Sincerity. *Thirdly*, He is compell'd to be ſincere, for *Popery* without him is

but

but a Name in *England*, and Lives by him, and muſt otherwiſe expect to expire with him. So that if it were poſſible for the People of his Communion to prevail with him to force his Religion upon the Kingdom, tho I think it as impracticable, *as to ſet Weſtminſter-Abby upon Bow-Steeple*, he muſt leave them to make ſatisfaction for the attempt in the next Reign; Or conclude, he never intends his Lawful Heirs to ſucceed him: And they muſt take him for the worſt of men to be guilty of an Injuſtice and Irreligion he has ſo often and ſolemnly, and earneſtly ſpoken againſt. But if that were no ſecurity to us, yet the ruin of thoſe that in all probability muſt follow that attempt, for whoſe ſakes we ſuppoſe him to endanger us, would obliege him to the ſoft & obleiging methods he now takes. So that we have his Honour, Conſcience, Nature, and the Security of his own Party for Ours. Come, 'tis Diſingenious to call Liberty of Conſcience *the Snake in the Graſs*, that like the Balm of *Gillead* cures the Gaps and Sores that Time and private Intereſts have made. And ſince he offers to confirm it by Law, *HE ONLY CHANGES THE SECURITY, HE DOES NOT DESTROY IT*; and which is more ſhe is a gainer by it: For whereas ſhe is now the National Religion by Compulſion, *ſhe will then keep her Station by Conſent*; both extreams yeilding a preference

ference to her, and so she is neither hated nor envied by them.

I would have her further reflect, that the keeping the *Penal Laws* on foot will not answer the end she does it for, since she believes they will be suspended during the time she fears most, and of the next Reign, she has no apprehension, and in the mean time she and the *Protestant Dissenters* have the Hands. So that the only reason for maintaining them, is the *Awe* they ought to give the *Papists* in this Kings time, and yet if what she suggests be true, *that the Papists aim at all*, pray, how far will those Laws awe them, that for that reason should rather aim at all. I say, what good will that do her, that must be the greatest Argument of the Force she fears they will use against her? and if they have no such design, there is no reason to keep them in awe, but much to soften and engage them, that we may all meet upon our common civil Bottom, and as one People with one Heart Fear God, after our own Perswasion; Honour the King, according to our Allegiance; and Love and Serve one another as becomes the Members of the great civil Family of this Kingdom.

But some, you tell me, think it had been better *The Laws where Repealed in a Protestant King's Reign, then in this*; But can any shew it is not fit in this;

this; for that's the Queſtion. Let us ſuppoſe ours were a Proteſtant, and they were repealed accordingly. How could we aſſure our ſelves our next Heir would not turn; Ay, the Prince in Poſſeſſion? And unleſs the Principles of Excluſion prevail'd, 'tis clear the Delemma would be the ſame, becauſe the ſecurity upon that notion is uncertain. I confeſs it had been better for us, it had been done before his coming to the Crown, but ſince he forgives us that deficiency, and offers to ſupply it, in ways the moſt aſſuring, why it ſhould not be good to do it now I cannot imagine: It is to ſay, it is not fit to be done, when it is moſt fit to make us beſt with him. We will have him truſt us, but we will not truſt him, where his intereſt Secures us.

Well, but you add, *That it is generally agreed, the Penal Laws ſhould be repeal'd, but not the Teſts.*

I muſt tell you, I do not agree with you in that Fact; for I hear there are divers Schiſms in the Church about it: Some for their repeal, and keeping of the Teſts: Some for repealing neither: Some for their repeal to Papiſts only: Some for Diſſenters only; And a few for a general Repeal of both; ſo that the Church is yet unreſolved what to do: But I will attend the great Queſtion.

For the Penal Laws, no matter if they go; *but if*

the Teſts be repealed too, the Government is loſt to the Romaniſts; for they may pack a Parliament of their own Religion, that in all Probability will make it national; and ſo Liberty of Conſcience will not ſerve them, nor ſave us. You ſee I am fair in the Objection, Ile give you my Anſwer as freely.

I cannot imagine the Councils that engage them to take a fair way, can lead them to be foul in it; for that's giving a pail of Milk, and kicking it down with their foot. If they had number to chuſe, or could be returned without it, they muſt naturally ſearch the moſt durable means of their ſafety: Now, that cannot be making their Religion national, both becauſe they are not the two hundred and fiftieth man, and that the attempt would eternally ruin them with the Kingdom, whoſe kindneſs, in a future Raign, their diſcreeter Conduct in this muſt ſecure. Nor could any thing be ſo odious, faithleſs and immoral, then for them to attempt it; for if ever they ſhould teach the Nation that Arithmatick, that thirteen is more then three and twenty, they will make *True Prophets* of thoſe they have taken pains to prove *Falſe Witneſſes*. But beſides their Diſcretion and Intereſt, the Kings Faith is given us, for his whole Raign, in his Great and Gratious Declaration, that he will not exceed the bounds of Liberty of Conſcience. By This, every Party

is

is ſecured with his in their Religion and Property; and This tyes him againſt any concurrance with the People repreſentatively, contrary to this made to them univerſally: We may aſſure our ſelves, he is not like to break it in either of thoſe reſpects, ſince we don't think that will ſo eaſily become the Religion of the Kingdom, or that whileſt the People are of another, they will chuſe a Repreſentative of the *Roman Communion.*

Laſtly, the Law that ſhall repeal theſe Laws, may be ſo drawn, as to make it impracticable to return a Parliament that is not choſen; as well as I dare ſay, it is below the Glory of our King, to uſe ways ſo unlike the reſt of his Open and Generous Principles.

My former Argument was *ad hominem*, for, what ever the Church of *England* men think, 'tis certain, the Anſwer they gave for a Popiſh Succeſſor, *we muſt truſt God and do our Duty*, is ſtill Cogent. For if Providence was ſtrong enough to ſecure us then againſt our fears of ſuch a Succeſſor, can an Act of Parliament, be a better Defence to us now. I fear ſuch are fallen from their Faith, and change their Devotion, for carnal ſecurities. Let us be all of a piece; not hot and then cold; one while for relying on Providence, and another time jealous to death, and beating our Brains for ſafety, as if there were no ſuch thing as God in the World.

World. The Queſtion is not about the King's impoſing his Religion upon us; for ſo I ſhould have almoſt ador'd the Gentlemen that left their imployments; but whether we will not impoſe our Religion upon the Friends of his Communion; and this ſhows no bigottry in the King, that he gives all Parties Liberty to muſter & exerciſe themſelves according to their own Principles, that he knows to be ſo very contrary to his: An odd way of advancing Popery, eſpecially by foul play. I wiſh any thing would ſatiſie us. And yet after ſo gratious a Declaration, both to Church and Diſſenters, and that has ſo decent a regard to the concurrance of a *Parliament* too, Who can be diſpleaſed? Have we been Hunting, Hawking Gaming, and Marrying with *Roman Catholicks* theſe ſix and tweny Years! and did they engage on the ſame ſide for the King's Father, help to ſupport the King abroad, and labour the Reſtoration of the Royal Family to their Inheritance; and are we now afraid of them for the Religion they had then, or that they ſhould have a few Offices with us, in the Reign of a Prince of their own way, that were the Companions of our ſufferings and Pleaſures? methinks it looks ill-natur'd at all times, and indiſcreet at this; ſince 'tis certain we may roundly and ſecurely tell them, You are upon your good behaviour: Be moderate at your peril: You are but a morſel of men;

and

and therefore as little feared as loved: 'Tis in your own power to be well with the Kingdom: Know when you have enough; and let us see you aim at no more then securing your civil Property and Interest in that of the Nation, from any violence, on the score of Religion, and that meer matters of Faith and Worship of God shall disable no man of his Birth-right. This Bottom is broad enough for all the interests of this *Kingdom* to meet upon; and till God from Heaven send us with miracles an higher Principle of Union; let us not neglect this lower, but sure means of our Peace and Happiness.

To Conclude, let us have a care of the *Snake* every where; in the *Grass*, in the *Square*, in the *Coffee-House*, in the *Church*, ay, and in the *Meeting-House* too; for 'tis ill company at all times, and in all places. Let us remember that not only the *four*, but the *seven* last Raigns have prov'd *Penal Laws* an Enemy to the Peace and Wealth of the Kingdom, and the *strictest Tests* no Security to the Government of it against the weight of its own miscarriages. Let us forgive one another, and look forward. I am for having the Church of *England* keep the Chair, but let the rest subsist. To fix Government upon any *Mode* of Religion, convulses it as often as that changes, at least hazards it.

That which takes in all Intereſts is the beſt foundation for any Government, becauſe it is leaſt expoſed to State Contingencies. Let us then bend our thoughts towards ſuch an expedient as may ſecure *Property* to all, the firſt reaſon of civil Government, and that which every Party for its own Intereſt muſt cloſe with. Three things ſtrictly ſpeaking make an Engliſh man, *Ownerſhip, Conſent in Parliament, and Right of Juries.* We all know what Laws have been made, and by whom to deſtroy theſe ſeveral Capacities, that frame an Engliſh man; amongſt which, pray let not that againſt *Conventicles* go for the leaſt! Let us ſee then what it is that diveſts us of theſe Native Priviledges, and like true Engliſh men, & Chriſtians, let us remove it; that in the Raign, of a King ſo ready to diſapoint the Enemies of his Glory, by repairing the Breaches of his People, and of the old true civil Government of his Kingdom, we may not be wanting to our ſelves and our Poſterity, in another **Great Charter**, to bury all our Prejudices, and Eſtabliſh a laſting Civil union among the Inhabitants of this Ancient and Famous Kingdom.

Yours more then my own.

FINIS.